

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 18443 191144Z
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INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
SECDEF
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 18443

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, MASS, KS, TH
SUBJ: VISIT TO THAILAND OF STAFFDEL BINNENDIJK/BECKINGTON

SUMMARY: DURING ONE HOUR MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER UPPADIT PACHARIYANGKUN AND DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER, GENERAL LEK NAEOMALI AUGUST 18, STAFFDEL BINNENDIJK/BECKINGTON QUESTIONED THEM ON RTG REACTION TO PLANS FOR WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. GROUND FORCES FROM KOREA AND ON CONTINUED NEED FOR JUSMAGTHAI. BOTH UPPADIT AND LEK WERE MORE INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING THAILAND'S SECURITY NEEDS AND THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THAILAND THAN KOREA TROOP WITHDRAWALS, BUT MAIN THRUST OF THEIR RESPONSE ON THE KOREAN QUESTION WAS THAT THAILAND WOULD LIKE TO BE AS WELL EQUIPED TO FACE HER POTENTIAL ENEMY (VIETNAM) AS SOUTH KOREA WILL BE TO FACE HERS. BOTH UPPADIT AND LEK MADE A STRONG PITCH FOR MAINTAINING JUSMAG ESTABLISHMENT
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 18443 191144Z

IN THAILAND. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH EMBASSY HAD REQUESTED MEETING AT DIRECTOR GENERAL LEVEL FOR STAFFDEL BINNENDIJK/BECKINGTON, APPOINTMENT WAS RAISED TO FOREIGN MINISTER LEVEL BY CABINET DECISION AUGUST 17. THE RTG HAS BEEN VERY ACCOMMODATING TO ALL U.S. VISITORS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, WHOM THE THAI CONSIDER TO HAVE INFLUENCE EITHER IN GOVERNMENT OR ON

PUBLIC OPINION. THE DECISION TO RAISE THE LEVEL OF THE STAFFDEL VISIT IN SPITE OF VERY HEAVY DEMANDS ON THE FOREIGN MINISTER AT THIS TIME IS INDICATIVE OF THE RTG'S CONTINUING CONCERN OVER U.S. POLICY TOWARD THAILAND AND SOUTHEAST ASIA.

2. WHEN QUESTIONED ABOUT RTG REACTION TO THE PLANNED WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. TROOPS FROM KOREA, DR. UPPADIT RESPONDED THAT ANY ACTION WHICH WOULD APPEAR TO ENDANGER THE SECURITY OF A FRIENDLY NATION WOULD BE VIEWED WITH ALARM. GENERAL LEK, WHO APPEARED BETTER INFORMED ABOUT U.S. PLANS IN KOREA THAN THE FOREIGN MINISTER, SAID HE WAS NOT OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE PLANNED TROOP WITHDRAWAL. HE EXPLAINED THAT "AS A MILITARY MAN" HE COULD UNDERSTAND THAT REDUCING THE U.S. TROOP LEVEL IN KOREA IS NOT RPT. NOT NECESSARILY CONTRADICTORY TO PRONOUNCEMENTS THAT THE U.S. INTENDS TO REMAIN A PACIFIC POWER AND MEET ITS COMMITMENTS IN KOREA, SO LONG AS THE U.S. RETAINS THE ABILITY TO SEND THE TROOPS BACK TO KOREA, IF THEY ARE NEEDED. BOTH UPPADIT AND LEK MADE THE POINT THAT, ALTHOUGH U.S. TROOPS WILL BE REMOVED, THE SOUTH KOREANS WILL BE WELL EQUIPPED TO MEET ANY CHALLENGE FROM NORTH KOREA AND CONTRASTED THIS TO THAILAND'S SITUATION IN WHICH ITS MAJOR THREAT, VIETNAM, POSSESSES ABUNDANT QUANTITIES OF EQUIPMENT FAR SUPERIOR TO WHAT THE THAI HAVE.

3. BOTH UPPADIT AND LEK USED THE KOREAN QUESTION AS A POINT OF DEPARTURE TO DISCUSS MATTERS MUCH CLOSER TO HOME - SOUTHEAST ASIA IN GENERAL AND THAILAND IN PARTICULAR. WHEREAS KOREA IS A POTENTIAL SPRINGBOARD TO JAPAN, THEY SAID THAILAND IS A POTENTIAL SPRINGBOARD
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 18443 191144Z

FOR COMMUNIST EXPANSION TO MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE, INDONESIA, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND. LEK DESCRIBED THAILAND AS A "FRONTLINE FORTRESS" AGAINST COMMUNIST EXPANSION AND WARNED THAT "IF THE FORTRESS CRUMBLES", SO WOULD THE LITTORAL STATES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. HE SAID THIS WOULD CUT VITAL SEA AND AIR ROUTES BETWEEN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE WESTERN PACIFIC AND JAPAN'S LIFELINE (FOR OIL FROM THE MID-EAST.

4. UPPADIT AND LEK URGED THE UNITED STATES TO REMAIN A MILITARY POWER IN THE FAR EAST AND TO RETAIN OUR MILITARY BASES IN THE REGION. THEY SUGGESTED THAT BASES IN THAILAND WHICH MIGHT BE USED BY THE U.S. IN THE EVENT OF EMERGENCY SHOULD BE KEPT IN A GOOD STATE OF REPAIR AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE U.S. COULD FINANCE THE NECESSARY MAINTENANCE, AS THE RTG WAS NOT ABLE TO. "WE ARE NOT ASKING FOR TROOPS," THEY EXPLAINED. "THAI SOLDIERS WILL DEFEND THAILAND," THEY SAID, BUT THEY APPEALED FOR THE SUPPLY OF MODERN WEAPONS TO REPLACE THEIR OUTDATED EQUIPMENT. LEK SAID THE RTG WOULD RATHER HAVE GRANT AID AND HOPED THE USG MIGHT "GIVE" THAILAND AMMUNITION NOW IN COUNTRY (AIT), BUT THIS WAS EXPRESSED IN AN OFF-THE-CUFF MANNER, MORE AS A "DRUTHER" THAN WITH ANY REAL HOPE THAT WE WOULD OR COULD BE RESPONSIVE TO HIS EXPRESSED WISH. HE ALSO REQUESTED THAT THAILAND BE GIVEN BETTER TERMS FOR FMS PURCHASES

BECAUSE OF BUDGET LIMITATIONS.

5. DR. UPPADIT URGED INCREASED LEVELS OF U.S. INVESTMENT IN THAILAND. HE ALSO STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF ASEAN IN ENHANCING REGIONAL SECURITY AND INDICATED THAT THE RTG ATTACHED A GREAT DEAL OF IMPORTANCE TO THE FORTHCOMING US-ASEAN TALKS IN MANILA.

6. BOTH MEN MADE A STRONG APPEAL FOR THE CONTINUATION OF JUSMAGTHAI TO ASSIST THE RTG IN ARRANGING FOR THE PURCHASE OF MUCH NEEDED MODERN WEAPONS SYSTEMS, THE BULK OF WHICH WILL BE PURCHASED FROM THE U.S.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THERE WAS NOTHING STARTLINGLY NEW IN THE THAI PITCH FOR U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE, THERE WERE SOME DIFFERENCES IN
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BANGKO 18443 191144Z

EMPHASIS. FOR ONE THING, THEIR ARGUMENTATION WAS BASED ALMOST SOLELY ON THE RATIONALE THAT U.S. INTERESTS ARE AT STAKE. NORMALLY, THE THAI RELY PRIMARILY ON A DIRECT APPEAL THAT THEIR OLD FRIEND SHOULD HELP THEM OUT IN TIME OF TROUBLE. SECOND, BOTH UPPADIT AND LEK REPEATEDLY REFERRED TO U.S. OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE MANILA PACT. WHILE THIS SUBJECT HAS BEEN MENTIONED BY THAI LEADERS IN PAST DISCUSSIONS, IT HAS NOT RECEIVED THE EMPHASIS THAT UPPADIT AND LEK GAVE IT. A THIRD DIFFERENCE WAS THE SUBJECT OF BASES. IN RECENT MONTHS THE THAI MILITARY HAVE MENTIONED INFORMALLY THAT THAI BASES COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE U.S. IN AN EMERGENCY, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN OFFICIAL DISCUSSIONS THAT ANYONE AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL HAS REFERRED DIRECTLY TO THE POSSIBILITY OF U.S. FORCES USING THE BASES AGAIN. UPPADIT AND LEK WERE BOTH REFERRING TO SUCH USE IN CONNECTION WITH OUR OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE MANILA PACT. IT WAS IN THE EVENTUALITY OF SUCH USE THAT THEY SUGGESTED THE U.S. CONTRIBUTE TO MAINTAINING THESE BASES IN A PROPER STATE OF REPAIR.

8. IN THE AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 18, STAFFDEL HAD SECURITY ASSISTANCE BRIEFING AT JUSMAGTHAI, THE SUBSTANCE OF WHICH WILL BE REPORTED SEPARATELY.
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TAGS: MPOL, MASS, KS, TH, (BINNENDIJK), (BECKINGTON), (UPPADIT PACHARIYANGKUN),
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